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SUBJECT: U.S. OUTREACH TO THE MUSLIM WORLD: FARAH PANDITH DESCRIBES AMERICAN EFFORTS TO BOLSTER PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE MUSLIM WORLD IN DVC WITH IRAQI CONTACTS

¶1. Summary: The Department's Senior Advisor on Muslim Engagement Farah Pandith conducted a digital video conference with Iraqi media and cultural contacts to explain her office's role in reaching out to Muslim communities. This event engaged major media players in Iraq during Ramadan, allowing for productive discussion about tolerance and U.S. efforts to partner with Muslim communities. Media reports on the dialogue were positive, as were the comments which EMBOFFS picked up from the audience immediately after the event. End Summary.

¶2. On September 9, post hosted 20 journalists, students and academics for a digital video conference (DVC) with Farah Pandith, Senior Advisor on Muslim Engagement. The program was preceded by an embassy-sponsored Iftar. Journalists from three of the leading newspapers in Iraq attended the event. The national "Al-Iraqiya" satellite station was granted exclusive television coverage of the event. "Radio Sawa," "Radio Rasheed," and "Radio Iraqi Republic" attended and reported on the event, as did the director of the website Neqash and cultural magazine "Masarat."

¶3. The event elicited news coverage from state-run TV station al-Iraqiya on September 11. The report began with footage of the twin towers being attacked and then directly shifted to images of President Obama and Secretary Clinton in Cairo, people walking in the streets of America, and inserts of the DVC gathering. The correspondent then stated: "Eight years have passed since the 9/11 bombings and the image has changed; America has a new face. This is the message President Obama delivered in his Cairo speech a few months back. Steps are being taken to expand the dialogue between Muslim societies and America." "Al-Iraqiya" ended its report by stating: "This new opening to the Muslim world comes after biased U.S. policies towards Muslims since September 2001. It means that the U.S. is serious about changing its image towards Muslims through open dialogue and cooperation between America and Muslim societies. The future will truly tell whether this relationship will succeed or not."

¶4. Lead evening stories for "Radio Iraqi Republic" and "Radio Rasheed" highlighted post's endeavors to enhance educational and scientific relations with Iraq. Radio Sawa's online article stated: "On the anniversary of September 11, State Department Special Representative calls for renunciation of violence." The article repeated Pandith's message that focusing on young people in Muslim communities is key in preventing violent ideologies. "Radio Sawa" asked about the possible ending of cultural projects in the wake of the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and in response, Pandith explained that "both President Obama and the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy have talked about the importance of cultural diplomacy, and of course we continue to do more in this area."

¶5. The success of this DVC was manifest in positive media reporting, and in comments gathered from guests after the event. Many of the journalists agreed with one comment that this was a "fresh" and interesting topic, requesting more such exchanges. Many of them said it was a pleasure and relief to cover an issue which was not political, security, or violence related.